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Testimony of Lori J. Pelletier
Secretary-Treasurer, Connecticut AFL-CIO
February 28, 2012 before the Labor and Public Employees Committee

Good afternoon Senator Prague and Representative Zalaski, and members of the Labor and Public Employees committee. My name is Lori Pelletier and I serve as the Secretary -Treasurer of the Connecticut AFL-CIO, and I am here to testify on behalf of our 900 affiliated local unions who represent over 200,000 union members from all 169 cities and towns.

H.B. No. 5291 (RAISED) AN ACT INCREASING THE MINIMUM WAGE, REMOVING THE MINIMUM WAGE TIP CREDIT, AND INCREASING PENALTIES FOR FAILURE TO PAY THE MINIMUM WAGE.

Today the affiliates of the Connecticut AFL-CIO are here to lend our support and pledge our commitment to HB 5291. This bill will deliver economic security for thousands of Connecticut's workers in the form of an increase in the minimum wage and tying future increases not to the whim of the political parties but to the Cost of living.

Now some may ask why would Union men and women who are covered by a collective bargaining agreement care about increasing the minimum wage. I am here to tell you throughout our history the unions of the CT AFL-CIO have stood up and given voice to workers whether they are in a union or not. **Legislation increasing the minimum wage is all about economic security** and about adding needed dollars to our economy and that is important to Connecticut's union women and men and their families.

According to the Economic Policy institute and these are their words and research not mine: "Economic studies looking at the employment impact of a minimum wage increase have become more sophisticated in recent years. An increase (in Minimum wage) puts additional income into the hands of workers who are likely to be struggling to make ends meet and therefore very likely to spend that extra money. While the magnitude of such a stimulus might vary depending on the structure of a local economy, it's clear that the impact is positive. **Thus, an increase in the minimum wage provides an excellent stimulus for the economy precisely when our economy needs it the most.** With evidence showing that an increase in the minimum wage stimulates the economy, leaves minimum wage workers and their families better off and does not cost jobs, the case for an increase in the minimum wage is clear."

This is good legislation, good public policy and good for our economy and it levels the playing field between good and reasonable employers and those taking advantage of the employment situation. please pass this bill and we look forward to working together to see that a majority General Assembly votes favorably for HB 5291 and that it is signed by the Governor.

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H.B. No. 5199 (RAISED) AN ACT CONCERNING DISCRIMINATORY HIRING PRACTICES AND UNEMPLOYED INDIVIDUALS.

We support this legislation. Last summer we held a series of roundtable discussions with workers, community leaders, and the unemployed. These conversations exposed the problem that is addressed in this legislation. Long term unemployed workers are being told they “need not apply”. Employers are making statements about the work ethic of a long term unemployed worker being lost, and that their skills are not fresh. Give me a break, workers do not want to be unemployed, mothers and fathers want to be able to provide for their families, but when we are dealing with an economy which has five workers applying for every one job opening unemployment isn’t a choice it is a reality. Please support this bill.

S.B. No. 181 (RAISED) AN ACT REQUIRING THE STANDARD AND PREVAILING WAGE BE PAID TO CERTAIN EMPLOYEES OF EMPLOYERS WHO RECEIVED FINANCIAL ASSISTANCE FROM STATE ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT ENTITIES.

We strongly support this bill. Tax dollars are tax dollars; it doesn’t matter if the contract for the work comes from a public agency or a quasi public agency. The purpose of the standard wage is to do just that pay at an industry standard so that tax dollars are lifting up the community not racing it down to the bottom. For every tax dollar spent in this matter it returns more than a dollar into the community, which in turns spurs economic growth. An ultimately isn’t that the purpose of the investment to help make our economy grow?

S.B. No. 151 (RAISED) AN ACT CONCERNING ADDITIONAL REQUIREMENTS FOR AN EMPLOYER'S NOTICE TO DISPUTE CERTAIN CARE DEEMED REASONABLE FOR AN EMPLOYEE UNDER THE WORKERS' COMPENSATION ACT.

We support this proposed bill. Employers have been punitive through the workers compensation system with this tactic for years. Injured workers are looking for relief from their work related injuries and employers or more often the insurance agents who represent the employers used excuse after excuse to deny or defer benefits. By putting in some additional requirements for the employers the system can come back in balance for the injured worker.

S.B. No. 152 (RAISED) AN ACT CONCERNING ONE DAY EQUALS ONE ABSENCE.

This bill allows an employer to consider it willful misconduct if an employee is absent for ONE day without just cause. And thereby would deny that employee the right to collect unemployment compensation. If one day of absence is so significant as to allow termination, my first question would be does the employer provide health care coverage with little or no out of pocket expense? Secondly, does the employer have a wellness policy? How about a daycare reimbursement, or perhaps in house free day care or maybe a policy allowing the worker to bring their sick child to work. This bill gives cover to those terrible employers who believe that they own workers not employ them, and it should be rejected out right!

S.B. No. 155 (RAISED) AN ACT ALLOWING EMPLOYERS TO PAY WAGES USING PAYROLL CARDS.

This bill has been raised in years past with a diverse group of stakeholders at the table. However, this year there was no such discussion and that raises concerns within the labor community. We have all been witness to the eroding of protections for consumers when it comes to banking issues and this bill changes the tone of payroll from an employment focus to a banking boon. Safeguards must be in place to protect employees from having their hard earned wages given to banks in the form of fees and service charges. Without those safeguards we will oppose this bill each and every time it is proposed.

S.B. No. 149 (RAISED) AN ACT CONCERNING THE DENIAL OF UNEMPLOYMENT
COMPENSATION BENEFITS TO CERTAIN DRIVERS WHO ARE UNEMPLOYED AS A RESULT OF
A DRUG OR ALCOHOL TEST.

We understand the sensitivity of this issue, and we are keenly aware of the danger that DUI imposes, however, often times those who fail these drugs and alcohol tests have more going on in their lives, and the alcohol and drug abuse is a symptom of a larger problem, called addiction. Unemployment benefits are as much about supporting a family during a difficult time as they are supporting an individual. We hope this committee focuses on the potential negative impact a young child or spouse could sustain if this bill were to become law.

Again on behalf of our affiliates and their members we thank the committee for holding this public hearing and if you have any questions I would be happy to answer them.